

First We Have Coffee by Margaret Jensen, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, CA, 1982. (15 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Take Him as He Is.

“Sir.” The librarian stood over Papa’s shoulder, interrupting his reading. “It is closing time. You’ll have to leave now.”

“Oh!” Papa looked up, not wanting to believe the librarian. As usual, the time had gotten away from him, but today, he knew, it shouldn’t have. “I got married yesterday, and I forgot ...”

Papa caught the last subway to Brooklyn. When he walked through the door of their honeymoon flat, Mama was reminded of the advice her mother had given her earlier in the day: “Take him as he is and you will be happy. He loves God, the library – and you – in that order. Always keep dinner warm in the oven.”

Keep dinner warm, she did. [page 15]

2. Following “the Call”.

I don’t know if Mama, on her wedding day, had any idea what “the call” meant. It was more than a call to preach the gospel and serve God’s people. It involved a call to pack and move to a new community after new community. It involved leaving the familiar and seeking new ground that needed planting. It meant following her charming minister husband, who was *so* spiritually minded, but not all encumbered with working out the practical details of life. It wasn’t long before Papa felt the tug of “the call.” God’s work in Wisconsin needed Elius Tweten. [page 16]

3. Wilderness Living.

Papa’s call was to preach. Her call was to make her family a home in this wilderness. The battle for survival had made the welcoming congregation of immigrants strong like oaks, trees of righteousness withstanding the storms of spring and blizzards of winter. They had weathered hardships of such magnitude that they didn’t notice the hidden needs of a lonely young wife who had come to learn her husband lived in another world – of his call, his Bible, his libraries, and his favorite second-hand bookstores. His scholarly mind thirsted for books like a desert thirsts for water. Taking Mama by the hand, walking and talking to her about the beauty around them never occurred to him. He silently loved Mama. She understood. [page 16]

4. Christmas.

Mama, the angel of Christmas, had treadled the old [*sewing*] machine through the quiet night hours to prepare our clothes and small gifts. Papa had helped out by walking with the croupy little ones, preaching endless sermons into their ears.

But tonight their work was over. We all were well and every need had been miraculously supplied through another year. Mama had prepared large platters of lutefisk, part of the traditional Norwegian Christmas dinner. We children begged for meatballs instead of the special fish, but one scornful glance from Mama and we ate lutefisk, a slippery, tasteless fish. Beautiful casseroles of rice pudding baked in the oven of the old cookstove. Dozens of loaves of Mama's bread and July Kakke (Yule cake) cooled on the kitchen table. Vegetables and fruits added color to the festivities, as did the decorated cookies. [page 25]

5. Heart Room and House Room.

Mama, as always, was prepared for the unexpected, and with her compassionate heart made each stranger feel a part of the family. "Ven you have heart room you have house room." She reminded us often. [pages 26-27]

6. Enough for Everyone!

Not only was Monday washday, it was soup day. The scraps dropped into the kettle of homemade soup and the loaves of Mama's rye bread seemed to multiply like the loaves and fishes in the New Testament story. Regardless of the number of unexpected guests, there was always enough. God and Mama could do anything! [page 36]

7. Obeying Father.

Ironing days were full of talk. Childish problems and questions were discussed in this classroom disguised as Mama's kitchen. Papa was unreachable. Within him spanned the stretch of the mountains, the depth of the valley, the pounding of the surf, and the lonely cry of the sea gull. He could place a compassionate arm around a man stumbling in the gutter and lead him to God, but he couldn't hear his children say, "Talk to us, Father!" He couldn't reach us, but he gave us the best that he had – Mama. To him she was a ruby without price, the woman above all women who would show his children how to obey his commands and daily live out the "why" of them. Slowly, but well, we learned – by word, by example, and sometimes "by strap." [page 37]

8. Disgracing the Ministry as Children.

In the pantry corner hung a red strap, which held a high place of dignity and honor in the eyes of us four children. One parental glance in that general direction was usually enough to call the troops to attention. No other humiliation could match that of bending, drawers down, and bare "rumpa" exposed to the world, over Mama's knee. The pain inflicted by the strap was minimal in comparison to the shame of the hanging drawers and the knowledge that you had somehow "disgraced the ministry."

"Children obey your parents," was one of the first Bible verses I ever learned.

One day in a moment of anger, I stuck out my tongue at our neighbor (albeit behind his back). Not only did I encounter the strap, but red pepper on my tongue. And I suffered through a face-to-face apology. The verse for the day was, “Be ye kind one to another.” Discipline was swift and sure! In fact, it was so sure that often we reached for the strap and red pepper and pulled down our drawers – the sooner done, the better. There was no escape. Just as sure as the punishment, however, was the sense of cleansing and forgiveness. Our slate was clean. The touch of love was a soft, warm glow. [pages 37-38]

9. God Lived in the House.

Discipline and order went together, just as coffee and sugar lumps went together.

Our wall motto about the unseen guest in our home, the listener to every conversation, was a reality. God lived in our house. It had to be clean in every way. [page 39]

10. God Answers Prayer in His Way.

Mama sensed my distress. Tenderly she placed her arms around me and quietly, but firmly, reminded me that we had prayed for shoes. God answered, not the way we think best, but God heard and answered. Mama never allowed sympathy to obscure the deeper lesson.

Mama continued, “Pride is a terrible thing, Margaret. It is not so important what we put on our feet, but it is important where your feet go. Sometimes we have to put on hard things – like the shoes –so God can keep our feet on the right path. If you worry more about how you look than about what you are, you will have many lessons to learn. Someday you will look back and say that this was an important lesson to learn. Remember this, God always answers prayer, but not always your way. Wear your shoes with a thankful, humble heart. Shall I tell you a secret to happiness?”

“Oh yes, Mama.”

As she gathered me in her arms and stroked my hair, she whispered softly, “A thankful heart, Margaret. A thankful heart.” [page 60].

11. Keeping a Thankful Heart.

“There is a time to die, a time to be born, a time to weep, and a time to laugh. One day is never the same as the one before it or after it. But if we keep a thankful, joyful heart and learn to trust God, we will have peace all of the time.” [page 67]

12. No One Was Alone.

To the Norwegian people the red brick walls of the church on the Square were not the walls made of stone. They were walls built out of love in the years of loneliness, comfort

in hours of sorrow, and hope in moments of despair. To the young, the walls contained golden dreams of tomorrow and moonlight and roses of romance.

No one walked alone! The young and the old together dreamed the impossible dream, and with heads held high, their faith could bear the most unbearable sorrows. Their answer to death was “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live (John 11:25).” The answer to the dark days of the Great Depression was, “But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).” The answer to loneliness was, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5).” During difficult periods of change in a new land the answer was, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (Hebrews 13:8)” and “For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89).” The answer for fear was, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am they God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness (Isaiah 41:10).”

The answer to youth who were rebelling against the old Norwegian ways was the apostle Paul’s warning to Timothy: Forget not the ones who taught you, your mother and grandmother.

Within the walls of home and church stood the protective laws of Moses. The “Thou shalt nots” were a wall stronger than stone, more valued than gold.

Disciple of the will was the sun and rain that nurtured the seeds of obedience and trust planted in my heart. [pages 89-90]

13. Jealousy and Teen-aged Expectations.

About this time Jeanelle, the baby, was born. How I resented Mama *so old*, having a baby! She was thirty-eight! It was crowded *enough* in our second floor cold-water flat. A new baby wasn’t an exciting thought for a fifteen-year-old sister. Mama had whispered to our nurse friend, Leona, “Help Margaret.” In the quiet of the night Leona talked to me about families, births, and life. She talked about attitudes and understanding, and when she was finished I was weeping in Mama’s room, “I’m sorry, and I’ll do all I can to help you.” [page 91]

14. Mama’s Best Meal.

Mama’s meatballs had become famous, and no one could duplicate them – not even her daughters. She learned the secret of kneading bread crumbs into two pounds of hamburger, ground twice. She added spices and onions until the consistency was perfect. Placing them in a hot skillet, Mama browned the meatballs slowly and evenly. A dark gravy bubbled forth when the flour browned slowly and potato water was added gradually. She placed the meatballs into the gravy and simmered them slowly. Mashed

potatoes, molded and decorated with chopped parsley, were served in a beautiful dish. Creamed carrots and peas topped off the best of meals.

As always, homemade rye bread made its way from the oven to the table. And for dessert – prune whip, sponge cake, or devil’s food cake. The golden coffee poured from the never-empty pot, as cups and hearts were filled with love. [pages 93-94]

15. The Road of Simple Obedience.

I thought about God’s ways, and His order for life. I thought about rebellion and pride, and the years of heartache that so often would follow. If we allowed God’s love and forgiveness to flow freely, the heartaches of life could be so simply washed away. Simple, but not easy. God’s way, not man’s way.

Mama had walked a road of simple obedience to God’s ways. In her daily routine of walk she had found His yoke easy and His burden light. And she had gently opened squeaking doors to the past and oiled them with joy so her children could walk through those doors, not remembering hurts, but only the all-encompassing love of God. [page 169]